The St. Louis Republic Magazine Section.

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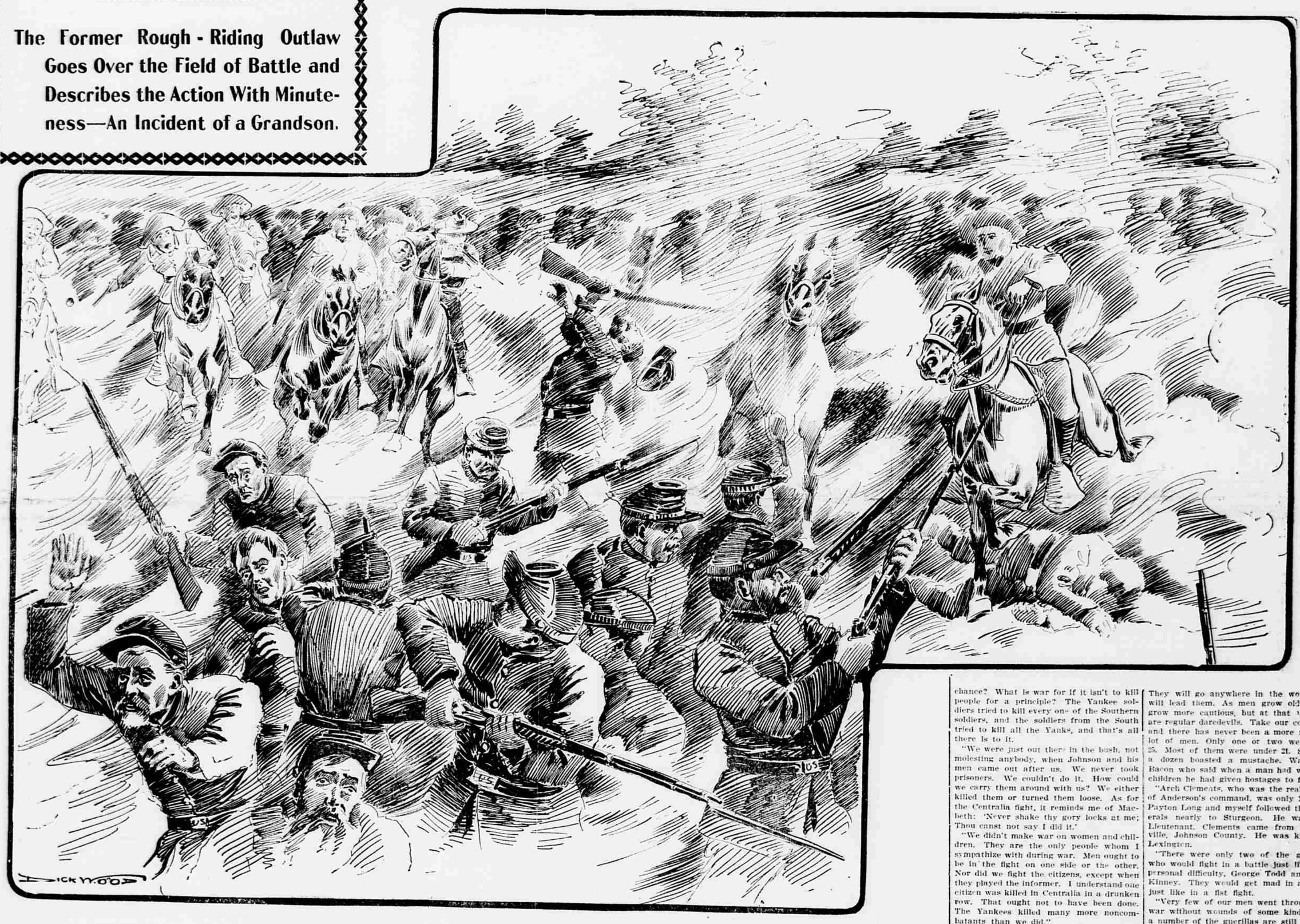
NINETY-THIRD YEAR. SUNDAY, AUGUST 5, 1900. PRICE FIVE CENTS.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, FRANK JAMES TELLS THE STORY OF THE FAMOUS CENTRALIA MASSACRE.

The Former Rough-Riding Outlaw Goes Over the Field of Battle and Describes the Action With Minuteness—An Incident of a Grandson.



"Yelling, shooting our pistols, upon them we went. Not a single man of the line escaped."

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC.

One of the most terrible conflicts of the Civil War occurred near Centralia, Boone County, Mo., in the afternoon of Tuesday, September 27, 1864. Nearly 200 Federal soldiers, commanded by Major A. V. E. Johnson of the Thirty-ninth Missouri Infantry, riding out after guerrillas, met there Captains Bill Anderson and George Todd, with 225 men. Scarcely a dozen of the Federal soldiers escaped with their lives, while of the guerrillas two only were killed and one mortally wounded. There is nowhere in the history of the world record of a charge more destructive than that made on the fair September afternoon. Every man in the Federal line of battle perished, and only half a score of those left to hold the horses got away.

The conflict has been described by surviving Union soldiers and by persons who were near at the time of or after the fight. But not until now has one of the chief actors of the Confederate side given his version. On a recent Sunday morning, for the second time in his life, Frank James rode over the battlefield and for the first time, described the fight.

"There is the spot," said Frank James, two miles and more from Centralia, shortly before the main road was left for a broad lane which led to S. L. Garrard's home. Yonder on the rise near the hayrick was the line of the Federal troops. Just this side, toward Centralia, stood the detachment which held their horses. On the edge of the wood beyond our men formed."

His memory served him well. He had not been to the field before nor since the day of the fight. No word had been spoken to indicate the locality. But he remembered accurately the entire surroundings. "I can go," he said, "to any battlefield where I was engaged and pick out almost instantly the locations. I guess it's the closeness to death which photographs the scene on one's memory."

A few moments later he came into the field itself. Corn was growing rank and a herd of cattle calmly feeding on the pasture land. Where the Federals stood was the golden yellow of a hay field. Here Mr. James wandered around for a few moments drinking in his surroundings with almost passionate eagerness. Then he told the story, quietly at first, but as he proceeded his face lighted up, there was a ring in his voice and his whole frame seemed ready for the fray again.

"The day before we had many a small skirmish down in Goslin's lane, between Columbia and Rocheport. I don't know what day it was. We could scarcely keep account of months at that time, much less days. We killed a dozen Federal soldiers in Goslin's lane and captured a wagon train of provisions and stuff. Out in the Perche Hills that night we joined forces with Bill Anderson. I was with Captain George Todd, one of the hardest fighters that ever lived, but less desperate than Anderson."

James paused a moment—his conversation was in scraps all day and only here put in connected form—he paused a moment and continued: "Bill Anderson had much to make him merciless. You remember the treatment his father and sisters received at the hands of the Kansas Jayhawkers. That night we camped on one of the branches leading into Young's creek not far from the home of Colonel M. G. Singleton. There were about 225 men, all told, in our combined command. Funny, isn't it? I've met or heard of at least 10,000 men who claimed to be with Quantrell or his lieutenants during the war, when the truth is there were never more than 350 or 400 from one end of the war to the other.

"In the morning Anderson took about thirty of his company and went into Centralia. I was not with him, nor was any of Todd's company. In Centralia Anderson captured a train, carried off a lot of stuff, shot down some soldiers who were on the train and did other things about which I know nothing save from hearsay and which Todd condemned when the boys returned. In the afternonn Captain Todd detailed a detachment of ten men under Dave Pool to go out and reconnoiter. We had heard there were some Yankee troops in the neighborhood. This squad was composed of Dave Pool, Wood and Tuck Hill, Jeff Emery, Bill Stuart, John Pool, Payton Long, Zach Sutherland and two others whose names I don't remember. They were to find out if there were any Federals around, how many, and, if possible, 'toll' them down toward our camp. Pool did his duty well. He found out the location of the Federals, rode close to them and then galloped rapidly away, as if surprised to see them. The Federals followed. I have never found anybody who could tell how many there were of them. Pool reported to us there were 350 and he was usually very accurate. On they came out from Centralia. Pool and his men came on and reported. Todd called out, 'Mount up, mount up!'"

The sharp, piercing eyes of James flashed.

"I don't care what your histories say, they carried a black flag. It was apparently a black apron, tied to a stick. We captured it in the battle that followed.

"We had no flag. We had no time to get one and no chance to carry it if we had one. The Yankees stopped near the rise of the hill. Both sides were in full view of each other, though nearly a half mile distant. The Yankees dismounted, gave their horses into charge of a detail of men and prepared to fight.

"John Koger, a funny fellow in our ranks, watched the Yankees get down from their horses, and said: 'Why, the fools are going to fight us on foot!' And then added, in seriousness: 'God help 'em.'

"We dismounted to tighten the belts on the horses, and then, at the word of command, started on our charge. The ground, you will notice, rises sharply and we had to charge uphill. For a moment we moved slowly. Our line was nearly a quarter of a mile long, theirs much closer together. We were still some 600 yards away, our speed increasing and our ranks closing up, when they fired their first and only time. They nearly all fired over our heads. We were lying low on our horses, a trick that Comanche Indians practice, and which saved our lives many a time. Only two of our men were killed, Frank Shepherd and 'Hank' Williams. A third, Richard Kinney, was shot and died three or four days afterwards from lockjaw. Shepherd and Kinney rode next to me on either side. Kinney was my closest friend. We had ridden together from Texas, fought side by side, slept together, and it hurt me when I heard him say, 'Frank, I am shot.' He kept on riding for a time and thought his wound wasn't serious.

"On we went up the hill. Almost in the twinkling of an eye we were on the Yankee line. They seemed terrorized. Hypnotized might be a better word, though I reckon nobody knew anything about hypnotism then, though George Todd, by the way, looked like Svengali. Some of the Federals were at 'fix bayonets,' some were biting off their cartridges, preparing to reload.

"Yelling, shooting our pistols, upon them we went. Not a single man of the line escaped. Every one was shot through the head. The few who attempted to escape we followed into Centralia and on to Sturgeon. There a Federal blockhouse stopped further pursuit. All along the road we killed them. The last man and the first man was killed by Arch Clements. He had the best horse and got a little the start.

"That night we left this woods and this neighborhood and scattered. I recrossed the river near Glasgow and went southward."

"It has been reported that my brother, Jesse James, was not at the Centralia fight; that he was sick in Carroll County at the time. This is a mistake. Jesse was here. He it was who killed the commander of the Federal troops, Major Johnson. The Younger boys were not at Centralia."

The plowshare had taken the place of the sword on the hillside. Frank James took an ear of corn from the battlefield. "I want some sort of a relic," he said, "and this is the most peaceful-looking I see." Later in the day Adam Rodemyre of the Centralia Guard gave him a bullet found on the field.

After two hours on the battlefield a visit was made to the Pleasant Grove burying ground on the Silver farm, where Frank Shepherd and "Hank" Williams are buried. The burying ground is a typical country cemetery, lying in a secluded spot, away from the main-traveled road, some four miles from Centralia.

The living guerrilla stood with his black slouch hat in his hand at the side of the sunken graves of his dead comrades. "To this complexion we must come at last," he said, looking down at the withered grass. "Our boys are scattered everywhere. You will find their graves in the hollows and on the hills, by the gulf and on these prairies. Many have no monument. They don't need any. They made their monument while they lived. They left a record for daring courage that the world has not yet surpassed. They don't need any monument after they are dead. Their sleep is just as sweet here as it would be in the beautiful city cemetery." Frank James pinched a twig from the great, green pine tree and walked away. "The marvel to me," he said to me, "is that I am not sleeping in a place like this. What have I been spared for when so many of my comrades were taken? 'Two men shall be working in a field; one shall be taken and the other left.' That's Scripture—you know my father was a Baptist preacher—a good man and a good preacher—it's Scripture, and it's life, too."

A brief stay was made at the farmhouse of William R. Jennings. Mr. Jennings helped bury the Federal dead the day after the battle. He could not remember the number, but there were several wagonloads. "I felt sorry for one poor boy, hardly more than 17 years old, who had almost reached the woods in an attempt to escape. All the Federals," continued Mr. Jennings, "had been shot in the head. So unerring was the marksmanship of the bushwhackers that frequently we would find no wound on the soldiers' bodies until we would turn back the eyelid or look into an ear, and there would be the single little hole that brought death." When the old man closed his story the party turned to go. "Well," said Mr. Jennings, "I hope we'll meet in a better world than this." "I hope so," said Mr. James, "where there is no fighting."

"When great, big, grown men, with full possession of all their faculties, refer to that battle as 'the Centralia Massacre,' I think they are pleading the baby act. We did not seek the fight. Johnson foolishly came out to hunt us, and he found us. Then we killed him and his men. Wouldn't he have killed every one of us if he had had a chance? What is war for if it isn't to kill people for a principle? The Yankee soldiers tried to kill every one of the Southern soldiers, and the soldiers from the South tried to kill all the Yanks, and that's all there is to it.

"We were just out there in the bush, not molesting anybody, when Johnson and his men came out after us. We never took prisoners. We couldn't do it. How could we carry them around with us? We either killed them or turned them loose. As for the Centralia fight, it reminds me of Macbeth: 'Never shake thy gory locks at me; Thou canst not say I did it.'

"We didn't make war on women and children. They are the only people whom I sympathize with during war. Men ought to be in the fight on one side or the other. Nor did we fight the citizens, except when they played the informer. I understand one citizen was killed in Centralia in a drunken row. That ought not to have been done. The Yankees killed many more noncombatants than we did."

When the old soldier spoke of the mistreatment of the South there was a grim, set look about his mouth and a cold glitter in his eyes. "Bushwhackers did some bad things, but they never devastated and ruined the country."

There was order No. 11—Ewing's. I am glad General Brigham put that on immortal canvass. That is a picture that talks. That order simply ruined hundreds of peaceful homes in Western Missouri. I know one man up in Jackson County who made a fortune going around picking up cattle that had been abandoned, a high-toned cattle thief."

"I think I know all the trees and shrubs in Missouri and what they are good for. I have had to use them for food and medicine sometimes, you know. Occasionally they fool me in Shaw's Garden, in St. Louis with the trees and plants from other countries, but with nothing from Missouri."

A bright-looking boy, about 12 years of age, shook hands with Mr. James. "My name," he said, "is Marquette Richards. My grandfather, John Marquette, was the last man killed in the fight." James looked kindly at the manly little fellow. "Well, son, you may be proud of your grandfather. He was about the bravest of Johnson's command. He fought all the way. Arch Clements shot him near Sturgeon. He rode a dun horse." No contrast of the day was more striking than that of Frank James and the grandson of his old enemy, the grizzled veteran and the mite of a boy.

"The stories about guerrillas riding with the reins of the horses between their teeth and firing with pistols in both hands is simply dime-novel stuff. There was never any such thing. We always held our horses with one hand and the pistol with the other. It was as important to hold the horse as it was to hold the pistol.

"Anderson always made us keep our horses in good condition. If a man did not keep a good horse and good pistols he sent him to the infantry. I rode a horse named 'Little George' at Centralia.

"At night and when we were in camp, we played like schoolboys. Some of our play was as rough as football. The truth was we were nothing but great big boys, anyhow.

"If ever you want to pick a company to do desperate work or to lead a forlorn hope, select young men from 17 to 21 years old. They will go anywhere in the world you will lead them. As men grow older they grow more cautious, but at that age they are regular daredevils. Take our company, and there has never been a more reckless lot of men. Only one or two were over 25. Most of them were under 21. Scarcely a dozen boasted a mustache. Wasn't it Bacon who said when a man had wife and children he had given hostages to fortune?

"Arch Clements, who was the real brains of Anderson's command, was only 20. He, Payton Long and myself followed the Federals nearly to Sturgeon. He was first Lieutenant. Clements came from Kingsville, Johnson County. He was killed at Lexington.

"There were only two of the guerillas who would fight in a battle just like in a personal difficulty, George Todd and Dick Kinney. They would get mad in a battle just like in a fist fight.

"Very few of our men went through the war without wounds of some kind. Quite a number of the guerillas are still living." Mr. James mentioned a number of men who were at the Centralia fight.

Henry Noland, William Noland, First Lieutenant James Little, Second Lieutenant Clark Renick, Orderly Sergeant John Baker, Payton Long, Foss Key, Jim Gibson, Clark Hockensmith, Dick Glasscock and William Bassham were killed in Kentucky. Jim Evans and George Robinson were captured and hanged at Lexington, Ky. Captain William Anderson was killed near Albany, Mo. Jim Anderson was killed in Texas after the war. Captain William H. Stuart was killed in Howard County. Ol Shepherd was killed near Lee's Summit after the war. George Todd was killed near Independence on Price's last raid. Dick Burnes was killed in Jackson County after the war. William Hulse of Jackson County died after the war. Bud and Daniel Pent died in Kentucky.

"The greatest raid made by the guerillas was the one in September, 1864. We were north of the Missouri River only about two weeks. We had with us never to exceed 250 men. We averaged a battle a day and we killed over 1,000 Federal soldiers, besides destroying much Yankee property. The only battles in the world's history to surpass Centralia are Thermopylae and the Alamo. Next to the Centralia fight is the skirmish at Baxter Springs, Kas., where we killed 130 of General Blunt's body guard."

"We never met many Federal soldiers that would fight us on equal terms. They would either want to outnumber us or would run away.

"I believe the saddest thing I know connected with the war," said Mr. James, and the man of blood and iron showed much feeling, as he told the story, "occurred at the battle of Franklin, Tenn. Young Theodore Carter was fighting there. But a few yards away was his old home with his mother standing at the window, watching the battle and waiting for him. He fought bravely that day. Almost within a stone's throw of his mother's door, within sight of the yard where he had played as a boy, he was shot down and died."

James Clark, engineer of the Wabash Branch Railroad, is the same man who took the ill-fated Wabash train into Centralia on the fatal September morning, 1864. As with Frank James the snow of years has drifted on his head and he is an old man now.

WALTER WILLIAMS.